

Bureau of Parks and Lands
Seboomook Unit Management Plan
Listening Session – Recreational Uses
Greenville High School Auditorium
March 23, 2005
6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

MEETING NOTES

Welcome and Introductions –*Ralph Knoll, Deputy Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands*

Background

Kathy Eickenberg, Seboomook Unit Management Plan Coordinator

Planning Context

- Parcels came with a few strings attached – ecological reserve management for Big Spencer Mountain and the St. John Headwaters Ponds; federal loon habitat protection funds used to purchase the property prohibit any new recreational facilities within 1,000 feet of a loon nest.
- The Unit is presently part of the North Maine Woods System. ATV's, horses and bicycles are not allowed on NMW lands. We are still in discussion with NMW regarding allowable uses on state lands.

Planning Process

- Basic process:
 - Inventories - conducting inventories of the resource attributes on the properties
 - Preplan work – understand the issues that need to be addressed in the plan.
 - Held a Scoping Meeting on August 31.
 - Special Focus meetings to explore issues in detail: Access and Recreational Uses
 - Draft Plan with an Advisory Committee - review and provide feedback on plan draft(s)
 - Final Draft taken to Public Hearing. (Projected mid-July or August)
 - Expect to complete the Plan by Fall of this year.
- Website has meeting notes and other information:
<http://www.state.me.us/doc/parks/programs/planning/seboomook/index.html>

Existing Recreation Facilities

Roads

- There are approximately 30 miles of main access roads on the Unit, principally the South Seboomook Road, the “Cut-off” or “Shortcut” Road, the Roll Dam Road, and the Seboomook Dam Road.
- We have already improved some of these roads, and have plans to continue to improve and upgrade these roads to our standards over the next two years.

Campsites

- 10 designated primitive camping locations on the Seboomook and Canada Falls parcels including 47 campsites; these are former NMW campsites now owned by BPL.
- 2 camping locations at sites owned by Great Lakes hydro at Seboomook Dam, with a total of 3 campsites;
- 2 campsites at the Baker Lake parcel.
- Campsites are all on water except for one campsite, the Seven-Mile Hill campsite. Two on Canada Falls Lake are water access only.
- 2 of the campsite areas on the West Branch below Seboomook Dam (Roll Dam and Burbank) are part of the Penobscot River Corridor West Branch trip.

Boat Launch and Canoe Portage Facilities

- 5 boat launch facilities on the Unit; including
two on Seboomook Lake,
one on Canada Falls Lake,
one on the West Branch of the Penobscot River at Roll Dam; and
one at Baker Lake.
- There are existing canoe portages around both Seboomook and Canada Falls Dams.
- The boating and canoe portage facilities on Seboomook Lake and Canada Falls Lake are maintained by Great Lakes Hydro as part of their Hydropower License requirements, and will be upgraded within three years of the date of the most recent License, December of 2004.

Hiking Trails

There is only one hiking trail officially designated on the unit - the trail up Big Spencer Mountain.

Snowmobile Trails

- The “Moosehead Loop Trail” crosses the Seboomook Unit as shown on the display map. You can see it is part of an extensive system around Moosehead Lake and connects to the West to Jackman and to the East to Millinocket.
- There is also a spur trail on the Big Spencer Mountain parcel. This trail is part of a trail connecting to the Moosehead Trail from the State-owned Nahmakanta Unit via Ragged Lake.

Tim Hall, Northern Parks Manager

- The Penobscot River Corridor is a water trail that is part of the State Parks system.
- There are four parts to the PRC; the Upper West Branch Chesuncook Lake; the East Branch; and the Lower West Branch (from Ripogenus Dam to the Debsconeags).
- The start of the West Branch trip has been traditionally either at Roll Dam, now part of the Seboomook Unit; or at Lobster Stream off the Lobster Trip Road.
- The popular take-out for this trip is at Umbazooksus Stream. This is about a 35 mile trip. Some travel all the way to the Ranger cabin and boat launch at the constriction between Ripogenus Lake and Chesuncook Lake, another 16 miles all on the lake.
- With State ownership of the Seboomook Unit, we now have management control of the lands adjacent to two additional river sections tying into the water trail – The North Branch and the South Branch of the Penobscot River, whose confluence is the inlet to Seboomook Lake just above Pittston Farm.
- Under the new FERC hydro license issued last December, the South Branch will be managed to have whitewater boating releases every Saturday beginning in July and lasting through mid September - this is a more technical whitewater boating area than the West Branch.
- Beginning in 2006, there will also be a fall flow release timed for fisheries attraction from Long and Dole Pond into the North Branch; this could also benefit those wanting to begin an extended PRC trip via the North Branch.
- The new hydro license also calls for higher minimum flows on the West Branch below Seboomook Dam – 500 cfs compared to the past minimum of 150 cfs; this will provide a nice flow level for beginning to intermediate level whitewater boating below Seboomook Dam.
- We are looking at the possibility of extending the PRC into the Seboomook Unit.

Public Comment–*Ralph Knoll, Moderating.* Members of the audience were invited to express any issues and concerns they have regarding the future recreational uses of the Seboomook Unit properties, including.

What recreational uses should be allowed?

What recreational facilities should be developed or improved for these lands?

Public Comments

A Summary of Recreation Issues/Questions/Comments

Recreational Uses: Participants spoke to the potential for a wide spectrum of uses including:

- Traditional North Maine Woods Uses (hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing)
- Hiking
- Nature walks/ study
- Cross-country skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Snowmobiling
- ATV riding
- Whitewater boating
- Canoeing/kayaking on lakes

Recreational Facilities: Some participants expressed an interest in development of some new recreational facilities, including:

- A hiking trail along the South Branch and West Branch
- Trailhead parking, both summer and winter, for hiking trail up Big Spencer Mountain
- Parking off-site of St. John Ponds area – keep remote
- Informational brochure about the unit including information about rare plants and rare plant communities
- Improvements to the canoe portages.
- ATV trails with camping opportunities; could be multi-use trails shared with snowmobiles in the winter.
- ATV loop around Moosehead (like the Moosehead snowmobile loop)
- Back-country cross-country ski trails; some groomed. Area at north end of Seboomook and Canada Falls area are of particular interest.
- Improved signage and information about the boat access sites (unaware that the site near Pittston Farm was a Public Boat Launch)

Recreation Issues:

- Review the existing snowmobile trail locations (especially at Carry Brook area) to be sure they are avoiding any sensitive natural areas.
- Examine suitability of existing snowmobile trails as ATV trails.
- Trail up Big Spencer Mountain should be hiking only

- ATV Clubs are just forming in this area; need to serve older and less able recreationists; ATV clubs willing to take on education and training for proper use of ATV's; willing to maintain trails.
- Concern about land transfers and loss of recreation opportunities for ATV's and snowmobiling
- Concern about ATV trails in proximity to residences; some theft already from snowmobilers.
- Question: what is the policy regarding ATV use on public lands? Answer: on most public lands they are allowed on gravel roads and on some designated multi-use trails. For the Seboomook Unit, because it is in the NMW system, it is unclear what the policy will be.
- We should keep signs to a minimum on this unit and maintain its backcountry character.
- If ATV users want to camp, be sure we have enough capacity. May need more sites.
- Need a "winter plan" that will allocate some areas for motorized use and others for non-motorized uses such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, winter camping. Snowmobiles now go everywhere, even where there are no groomed trails. Have seen them even in St. John Ponds area.
- Findings of a recent tourism survey by the University of Maine found people are not embracing more motorized use in this area. Is affecting quality of life. [Note the Bureau of Public Lands has located this document; it was a study conducted by the Departments of Resource Economics and Policy and the Margaret Chase Smith Center, and is available online at http://www.umaine.edu/mcsc/Research/EcoDev_menu.htm]
- The Bureau should consider whether there needs to be a new allocation category for areas that have high natural resource values worthy of protections similar to an ecological reserve, but do not meet the requirements of an ecological reserve due to size - Baker Lake area should be considered for such a special designation.
- A number of people expressed opposition to allowing ATV's on the unit due to concerns with erosion, disturbance to wildlife, and intrusion upon traditional uses.